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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KINSHASA 001387

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: KARIM STALLING ON INTEGRATION,
RESUMES RECRUITMENT

REF: A. KINSHASA 1165

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 1200

[1](#)C. KINSHASA 1091

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Militia leader Peter Karim, who agreed in mid-July to disarm his Front for National Integration (FNI) militia and integrate his forces into the Congolese military (ref A), is refusing to honor the agreement he signed with the GDRC. Since the accord was reached, Karim has charged that the GDRC is not fulfilling certain conditions outlined in the agreement, particularly his insistence to be made a colonel in the military. In the meantime, Karim has reportedly been recruiting new militia members throughout Ituri, including children. Additionally, fellow (and possibly allied) militia leader Mathieu Ngonjolo of the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC) is also reportedly renewing efforts at recruiting more militia members, despite having signed a cease-fire agreement with the government (ref B). Another notorious Ituri militia leader -- Cobra Matata of the Patriotic Front for Resistance in Ituri (FRPI) -- remains at-large following a breakdown in negotiations earlier in August. The lack of progress in militia disarmament and integration in the past month poses significant security risks for the region. End summary.

KARIM CLAIMS GDRC VIOLATING AGREEMENT

[1](#)2. (C) FNI militia leader Peter Karim agreed in mid-July to voluntarily disarm his forces and enter the DRC's integration program, following a series of negotiations with the GDRC, during which several concessions were made to Karim. Conditions agreed to by Congolese officials included allowing Karim and his militia to remain in Ituri after being integrated into the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) -- although they would be deployed throughout the District -- and making Karim himself a colonel in the FARDC. To facilitate the FNI disarmament, a special transit and training site was established near Kpandroma (nearly 60 miles northeast of Bunia), in the region where the FNI has its main base. Since the site became operational in late July, though, Karim has refused to surrender either himself or his forces, claiming the GDRC has reneged on promises it made during negotiations.

[1](#)3. (C) The main cause behind Karim's refusal to disarm apparently lies in his belief that he and the GDRC agreed to make him a colonel before entering the integration process. MONUC-Bunia Head of Office Charles Gomis -- who helped

facilitate the GDRC-FNI agreement -- said Karim's interpretation of the accord is wrong. While the GDRC agreed to give Karim the rank of colonel, they promised to do so only after completing integration and training. Karim, though, is reportedly insisting on receiving the appointment before surrendering.

MILITIA RECRUITING REPORTEDLY INCREASING

14. (C) Discussions between Karim and the GDRC have not taken place since late July, according to MONUC officials in Bunia. In the last month, reports have surfaced indicating that while Karim is stalling on integration, he has begun recruiting new members for his FNI militia. In mid-August, MONUC reported from sources in Ituri that Karim had been actively encouraging people, including children, to join the militia -- presumably to enlist as many members as possible before the end of the disarmament process. (Note: CONADER, the Congolese agency running the demobilization process, had last set the deadline for militia surrender on July 26, after two previous extensions of the program. On August 5, CONADER again extended the deadline, this time to August 30. End note.) MONUC-Bunia's Child Protection office reported August 24 that several former child soldiers who had recently demobilized in the Kpandroma area said that Karim had attempted to keep them in the FNI militia and was adding other child soldiers to his ranks. In addition, local sources told MONUC that Karim had ordered a ban on individual surrenders -- implying that none of his militia members were to disarm.

15. (C) Residents in Fataki (approximately 40 miles northeast

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of Bunia) have reported seeing elements of Karim's militia openly recruiting new members. The same sources report that the FNI has been building several new barracks and training facilities around the Fataki area. Sightings of these alleged facilities have come from a variety of local sources, although MONUC has not yet been able to verify their existence.

KARIM ASKS FOR MORE MEETINGS BEFORE INTEGRATING

16. (C) Karim met August 27 with members of the local Lendu community in Lalo (about 35 miles northeast of Bunia) to discuss the state of his militia's disarmament and the possibility of moving the process forward. (Note: Some members of the Lendu community engaged Karim unsuccessfully in the initial discussions over the release of seven MONUC peacekeepers his militia was holding hostage in Ituri. End note.) According to one of the meeting's participants, Karim said he was "surprised" to hear there was a deadline for his troops to integrate, since it was not mentioned in the agreement he signed with the GDRC. He complained that CONADER was also not living up to its agreements, claiming that according to the deal signed, he agreed to gather his troops in various villages and CONADER would supply them with food. Karim insisted such assistance had not yet been provided.

17. (C) Karim told the Lendu leaders he wanted to participate in two meetings before beginning the integration process. The first meeting he said needed to address "security issues," and must include members from the Lendu community and MONUC. Karim reportedly demanded this meeting take place in Lalo August 31. Karim proposed a second meeting include CONADER and GDRC representatives, in addition to the previous participants. No date or location was set for this potential meeting. As of August 30, MONUC officials say there have been no indications the proposed August 31 meeting will take place.

¶8. (C) As discussions with Karim and the FNI have dragged on without results, similar negotiations with Mathieu Ngonjolo and the MRC have been equally dispiriting. The MRC signed a cease-fire agreement with the GDRC July 26 (ref A), in which Ngonjolo and the MRC were given the opportunity to integrate into the FARDC. While exact details of the agreement were not initially spelled out, Ngonjolo pledged to disarm. Since the accord was signed, however, the MRC has met just once with local leaders and MONUC officials to follow up on the modalities of disarmament and integration. In fact, much like Karim and the FNI, Ngonjolo and the MRC have also reportedly been recruiting new members.

¶9. (C) MRC representatives met August 16 with Lendu community leaders and MONUC officials in Mongbwalu (some 31 miles northwest of Bunia) to plan measures to convince MRC members to surrender. MONUC-Bunia Head of Office Gomis, in addition to MONUC military commanders and CONADER officials, met at the same time with the MRC representatives to discuss additional logistical and financial support for such sensitization efforts. In the meeting, MRC officials requested CONADER extend again the demobilization period from August 30 to September 10 to provide more time for its members to report to transit sites. Gomis said CONADER had provided the MRC with 1,250 USD to implement, beginning August 10, a program designed to educate MRC members about the cease-fire and integration agreement. He added that the MRC had clearly not undertaken a serious effort to convince its members to surrender, as five days of sensitization programs had yielded only a handful of militia members coming in from the bush. MONUC and CONADER officials said no further support could be given to the MRC unless the militia provided concrete results of their work to disarm and demobilize.

¶10. (C) Since the August 16 meetings, no further discussions have been held with the MRC regarding integration or demobilization. MONUC has in the interim received several reports of MRC militias recruiting new members, including children, throughout Ituri District. MONUC military officials reported August 28 that Ngonjolo met with other MRC leaders to discuss plans for regrouping and rebuilding the militia's forces. In addition, MONUC reported that the group is reportedly planning to work against the newly-elected

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Congolese government "with the help of a foreign country."

COBRA MATATA AND FRPI MIA

¶11. (C) The third major militia leader in Ituri -- Cobra Matata of the FRPI -- has not agreed to any integration or demobilization plan, despite entreaties made in late July by MONUC and the GDRC. As reported ref A, MONUC officials had been making contact with Matata to encourage him to agree to a cease-fire. A planned August 10 meeting between the FRPI and a GDRC delegation never took place, as the militia leader did not show up for the encounter. Eventually, the GDRC representatives left Ituri without securing an agreement or meeting the FRPI leader. No contact with the group has been made since. In addition, a top-ranking FRPI official who had surrendered in June to MONUC peacekeepers (ref C) mysteriously disappeared from his demobilization camp in Bunia. Colonel Emile Muhito, head of the FRPI's political and military wing, left the Bunia transit site August 9 with his family and did not return. MONUC military officials said they suspect he returned to the militia.

NO DISARMAMENT EXTENSION LIKELY

¶12. (C) Colonel Xavier Duku, the CONADER representative in Ituri, met August 26 with Lendu community leaders in Kpandroma to discuss ways to convince Karim, Ngonjolo and others to enter the disarmament program. Duku said it was unlikely CONADER would be able to extend the demobilization program past August 30 because of a lack of funds. He added that there is a danger CONADER may have to withdraw personnel and equipment from the Kpandroma transit site (established for Karim's FNI) if militia members do not show up for disarmament soon. Duku said his agency does not have enough money to keep the site open, particularly if it is not processing any ex-combatants. If FNI members do not present themselves at the site before the August 30 deadline, Duku said it would be unlikely CONADER would be able to offer them any demobilization assistance.

STATUS OF MILITIA SURRENDERS

¶13. (C) As of August 23 (the date for which the most recent figures are available), a total of 4,716 militia members in Ituri have voluntarily surrendered since the beginning of June. Included in this figure are 308 former child soldiers who have transited the demobilization point in Kpandroma during the last month. In this time, more than 2,300 weapons have been collected along with nearly 350,000 rounds of ammunition. Since Karim agreed to disarm and the MRC cease-fire was signed at the end of July, approximately 1,200 additional ex-combatants have reported for demobilization. Nearly 900 of that total, though, surrendered before the beginning of August, indicating that any potential prolongation of the demobilization period will not likely result in more ex-combatants coming out of the bush.

¶14. (C) MONUC officials, however, doubt whether most of these 4,700 militia members are "true" militia fighters. MONUC Chief Military Information Officer Lt. Col. Mike Burke said many of those reporting for demobilization are "recent recruits" -- people who were given a gun by a friend or relative and sent to a CONADER site to collect the ex-combatant stipend. Burke said by even the most conservative estimates, there could not have been that many active militia members in Ituri at the beginning of June. (Note: Previous estimates had placed the number of militias in Ituri around 2,000. End note.) Burke added that the fact that nearly all ex-combatants have selected demobilization as opposed to integration into the FARDC indicates that most of these people were never "real" militia members in the first place. MONUC officials in Bunia said they suspect the bona fides of many recent ex-combatants as well. Gomis said militia leaders are likely sending their "members" in for demobilization to generate the perception that their ranks are bigger than expected, and are using that impression to extract more concessions from the GDRC during negotiations.

COMMENT: LOST OPPORTUNITIES

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¶15. (C) Reversals in Ituri over the past month have slowed the progress made in the District's security situation since the beginning of the year. The refusal of Karim, Ngonjolo and Matata to disarm and integrate -- by whatever means or in whatever manner -- is a step back for the pacification of this troubled region. Certainly, the GDRC still has time to find a way to eliminate the militia threat, but that window of opportunity is quickly closing. While no armed conflicts have taken place since the cease-fire agreements were made, the fact that militias are recruiting suggests they may be planning for future military activities. This reported increase in recruitment may simply be a face-saving measure for militia leaders to claim greater support than they actually have -- especially given that if and when they

disarm, each ex-combatant receives a monetary stipend, which is likely reverted back to militia leaders. In any event, more militia members remaining in the bush creates the possibility for increased violence, harassment and illegal commerce -- thus further destabilizing the region. Moreover, this renewed recruiting will give the local population the impression that militia demobilization efforts have failed.

¶15. (C) Comment, continued: Karim's apparent attitude toward not integrating, coupled with his demand to be made a colonel immediately, suggests he has little intention of now surrendering. Karim clearly feels he is in a position of strength in his negotiations with the GDRC, and is using that advantage to delay and garner more concessions. Karim's position, though, is altogether wrong. First, as has been reported previously, the GDRC only agreed to award Karim the rank of colonel after he completed integration. Second, there was never any agreement to provide food and assistance at "various villages" for FNI militia members. Karim and his group were to be provided for only at authorized demobilization sites established by CONADER. Karim is thus backtracking on his prior agreements, making his latest arguments specious and dangerous. Likewise, Ngonjolo's insistence on receiving more money for "sensitizing" his members about demobilization ring false. The problem, though, is that GDRC officials continue to accede to such demands, which lead to even greater concessions.

¶16. (C) Comment, continued: GDRC officials have understandably been preoccupied with the recent presidential and legislative elections. Scant attention has been paid to the overall security situation (save for recent events in Kinshasa), particularly in Ituri during the past few months. This blind eye towards the region has consequently resulted in a resurgence of militia recruiting and potential activity. Further, local officials do not have the authority to negotiate deals with the militias or promise incentives for their surrender. Effectively, no one is in control of monitoring or managing Ituri's militia problem, making the District susceptible to violence or possible destabilization in the post-election period. If the GDRC continues to yield to militia demands, these groups will never disarm. The GDRC must become fully engaged in remedying the situation -- through either military or diplomatic means -- or else risk a return of an Ituri plagued by militia activity. End comment.
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